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News Release ~ Communiqué

Lands to be protected for proposed new national park

OTTAWA, February 8, 1995 Canadian Heritage Minister Michel Dupuy today announced that an agreement has been reached to protect 28,000 km² of land in the western Arctic for a proposed new national park.

The land withdrawal, to be made under the Territorial Lands Act, is the result of cooperation between the federal government, the Government of the Northwest Territories, aboriginal organizations and the private sector.

« This is a significant step towards meeting the federal government commitment to complete the national park system by the year 2000, » said Minister Dupuy. « The land withdrawal will ensure that the proposed park lands are not compromised by incompatible land uses, pending finalization of a formal park agreement and legal establishment of the park under the National Parks Act. »

The lands, which cover an area slightly larger than Lake Erie in the Melville Hills east of Inuvik, will make an excellent addition to Canada's world-renowned system of national parks. In particular, the proposal will protect the core calving ground of the Bluenose herd of barren ground caribou, which is culturally and economically important to the native people of the region.

The agreement to withdraw these lands for national park purposes was made following the completion of several technical studies of the park proposal, including a mineral and energy resource assessment (MERA).

A park establishment agreement is currently being negotiated with the Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic and the Government of Northwest Territories for the largest part of the proposed park, to be known as Tuktut Nogait National Park. Discussions will soon be initiated with the Inuit and the Sahtu Dene regarding those parts of the proposed park that lie within their traditional territories.

All three First Nations whose traditional territories are affected, as well as the Government of the Northwest Territories, have expressed support for the land withdrawal as a means of providing interim protection to the proposed park lands. Minister Dupuy also acknowledges the significant contributions of Inuvialuit, who originally suggested the park proposal, and of Darnley Bay Resources Ltd., who recently agreed to relinquish their prospecting permits within the proposed park.

Information:

Bruce Amos
Parks Canada
Canadian Heritage
(819) 997-4908

Alain Garceau
Press Secretary
Canadian Heritage
(819) 997-7788